News release

Wooden 'beehives' replaced by plastic ones

15 July 2002

As more and more people turn to plastic windows to keep out the elements, weather experts themselves are now experiencing the benefit of using state-of-the-art plastic material to help them measure the weather.

For years the Met Office has measured the temperature of the air using delicate thermometers housed in wooden boxes, known as Stevenson screens. The louvered screens, which look similar to beehives, have traditionally been made of wood because that was the material available when they were invented in the 1870s. However, eventually the wood rots, especially on those screens in exposed places, and the white paint, which is used to reflect the sun's heat, flakes, so expensive maintenance is ongoing.

Thanks to a partnership between manufacturer Metspec Ltd, of Coventry, and the Met Office, plastic screens are now being used at observing stations for the first time.

Dave Hatton, Met Office Senior Instrument Scientist, said: "Metspec approached us and we agreed to help them design the screens to ensure the screens do their job correctly. After initial tests, we have now introduced them to some areas. However, we are currently using them alongside the wooden screens and will be monitoring the results to ensure they are comparable. Recording accurate temperature measurements is especially important in climatological terms, so we have to ensure they are working correctly."

Jonathan Wright, from Metspec, said: "Rather than just delivering modest improvement to durability, we specified, tried and tested materials and components; for example, using acrylic for the louvers and a polyester paint system electronically applied over the aluminium frame. The new plastic screens are ideally suited to automated sites where the data can be taken remotely for long periods, thus doing away with the need for maintenance visits."

The Met Office has just taken delivery of 50 of these new plastic screens,19 of which have been issued to observing stations for installation. A further order for 50 more, to be delivered by the end of 2002, has just been issued.

Notes to editors:

The Met Office will be doing a presentation at the World Meteorological Organization conference in Bratislava, Slovakia in September, and Metspec will be exhibiting there also.
Electronic photograph available.

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